

Case Study-Based Learning

Enhancing Learning Through Immediate Application

If you've ever tried to learn a new concept, you probably appreciate that "knowing" is different from "doing." When you have an opportunity to apply your knowledge, the lesson typically becomes much more real.

Adults often learn differently from children, and we have different motivations for learning. Typically, we learn new skills because we want to. We recognize the need to learn and grow, and we usually need – or want – to apply our newfound knowledge soon after we've learned it.

A popular theory of adult learning is andragogy (the art and science of leading man, or adults), as opposed to the better-known pedagogy (the art and science of leading children). Malcolm Knowles, a professor of adult education, was considered the father of andragogy, which is based on four key observations of adult learners:

1. Adults learn best if they know why they're learning something.
2. Adults often learn best through experience.
3. Adults tend to view learning as an opportunity to solve problems.
4. Adults learn best when the topic is relevant to them and immediately applicable.

This means that you'll get the best results with adults when they're fully involved in the learning experience. Give an adult an opportunity to practice and work with a new skill, and you have a solid foundation for high-quality learning that the person will likely retain over time.

So, how can you best use these adult learning principles in your training and development efforts? Case studies provide an excellent way of practicing and applying new concepts. As such, they're very useful tools in adult learning, and it's important to understand how to get the maximum value from them.

What is a Case Study?

- Case studies are a form of problem-based learning, where you present a situation that needs a resolution. A typical business case study is a detailed account, or story, of what happened in a particular company, industry, or project over a set period of time.
- The learner is given details about the situation, often in a historical context. The key players are introduced. Objectives and challenges are outlined. This is followed by specific examples and data, which the learner then uses to analyze the situation, determine what happened, and make recommendations.
- The depth of a case depends on the lesson being taught. A case study can be two pages, or 20 or more pages. A good case study makes the reader think critically about the information presented, and then develop a thorough assessment of the situation, leading to a well-thought-out solution or recommendation.
- Why Use a Case Study?
- Case studies are a great way to improve a learning experience, because they get the learner involved, and encourage immediate use of newly acquired skills.
- They differ from lectures or assigned readings, because they require participation and deliberate application of a broad range of skills. For example, if you study financial analysis through straightforward learning methods, you may have to calculate and understand a long list of financial ratios (don't worry if you don't know what these are). Likewise, you may be given a set of financial statements to complete a ratio analysis. But until you put the exercise into context, you may not really know why you're doing the analysis.

With a case study, however, you might explore whether a bank should provide financing to a borrower, or whether a company is about to make a good acquisition. Suddenly, the act of calculating ratios becomes secondary – it's more important to understand what the ratios tell you. This is how case studies can make the difference between knowing what to do, and knowing how, when, and why to do it.

Then, what really separates case studies from other practical forms of learning – like scenarios and simulations – is the ability to compare the learner's recommendations with what actually happened. When you know what really happened, it's much easier to evaluate the "correctness" of the answers given.

When to Use a Case Study

As you can see, case studies are powerful and effective training tools. They also work best with practical, applied training, so make sure you use them appropriately.

Remember these tips:

- Case studies tend to focus on why and how to apply a skill or concept, not on remembering facts and details. Use case studies when understanding the concept is more important than memorizing correct responses.
- Case studies are great team-building opportunities. When a team gets together to solve a case, they'll have to work through different opinions, methods, and perspectives.
- Use case studies to build problem-solving skills, particularly those that are valuable when applied, but are likely to be used infrequently. This helps people get practice with these skills that they might not otherwise get.
- Case studies can be used to evaluate past problem solving. People can be asked what they'd do in that situation, and think about what could have been done differently.

Ensuring Maximum Value from Case Studies

The first thing to remember is that you already need to have enough theoretical knowledge to handle the questions and challenges in the case study. Otherwise, it can be like trying to solve a puzzle with some of the pieces missing.

Here are some additional tips for how to approach a case study. Depending on the exact nature of the case, some tips will be more relevant than others.

- Read the case at least three times before you start any analysis. Case studies usually have lots of details, and it's easy to miss something in your first, or even second, reading.
- Once you're thoroughly familiar with the case, note the facts. Identify which are relevant to the tasks you've been assigned. In a good case study, there are often many more facts than you need for your analysis.
- If the case contains large amounts of data, analyze this data for relevant trends. For example, have sales dropped steadily, or was there an unexpected high or low point?
- If the case involves a description of a company's history, find the key events, and consider how they may have impacted the current situation.
- Consider using techniques like **SWOT analysis** and **Porter's Five Forces Analysis** to understand the organization's strategic position.
- Stay with the facts when you draw conclusions. These include facts given in the case as well as established facts about the environmental context. Don't rely on personal opinions when you put together your answers

Writing a Case Study

You may have to write a case study yourself. These are complex documents that take a while to research and compile. The quality of the case study influences the quality of the analysis. Here are some tips if you want to write your own:

- Write your case study as a structured story. The goal is to capture an interesting situation or challenge, and then bring it to life with words and information. You want the reader to feel a part of what's happening.
- Present information so that a "right" answer isn't obvious. The goal is to develop the learner's ability to analyze and assess, not necessarily to make the same decision as the people in the actual case.
- Do background research to fully understand what happened and why. You may need to talk to key stakeholders to get their perspectives as well.
- Determine the key challenge. What needs to be resolved? The case study should focus on one main question or issue.
- Define the context. Talk about significant events leading up to the situation. What organizational factors are important for understanding the problem and assessing what should be done? Include cultural factors where possible.
- Identify key decision makers and stakeholders. Describe their roles and perspectives, as well as their motivations and interests.
- Make sure you provide the right data to allow people to reach appropriate conclusions.
- Make sure you have permission to use any information you include.

A typical case study structure includes these elements:

- **Executive summary** – Define the objective, and state the key challenge.
- **Opening paragraph** – Capture the reader's interest.
- **Scope** – Describe the background, context, approach, and issues involved.
- **Presentation of facts** – Develop an objective picture of what's happening.
- **Description of key issues** – Present viewpoints, decisions, and interests of key parties.

Case studies can be used in many ways, as team-building tools and for skill development. You can write your own case study, but a large number are already prepared. Given the enormous benefits of practical learning applications like this, case studies are definitely something to consider adding to your next training session.

Developing and using case studies

Introduction

Case studies are descriptions of a real life experience, related to the field of study or training, which are used to make points, raise issues or otherwise enhance the participants' understanding and learning experience. The account usually follows a realistic scenario, such as a management or technical problem, from start to finish. Because they provide practical examples of problems and solutions, challenges and strategies, they support more theoretical material and often make the "lesson" more memorable and believable for the class.

As Laura Millar notes in *Writing Case Studies: A Manual* (part of the *Managing Public Sector Records Training Program* materials published in 1999 by the ICA and IRMT), case studies are particularly useful in the archives and records management field as there is so much variety in the full range of archives and records management programs with many different types of organizations as well as local, national, and regional differences.

How to develop and write case studies

There are no definite rules about developing case studies. The initial choice of subject will depend on serendipity — a practitioner will have had an experience which provides a good example of a situation which illustrates something the teacher wants the class to learn. Case studies can of course be fictional in detail whilst still based on a practitioner's experience and knowledge. Fictitious case studies are appropriate if the real example is not rounded enough or there is some reason for keeping organizations and individuals confidential. It is also possible to write a single case study, for example about developing a project plan, which incorporates examples of documentation and action from several different projects in various organizations.

The case study may include some or all of the following:

- Setting the scene
 - details of the organization
 - description of the players
 - outline of the particular challenge or problem
 - any additional information necessary to understand the scenario
- Resources available
- Identification of complexities or issues in the work environment affecting the project
- Account of how the problem was solved, including
 - personnel / stakeholders
 - planning phase
 - options considered
 - implementation
 - outcomes
- Examples of documentation such as project plans, budgets, memos, data gathered

- Analysis of project and its success/failure

Depending on how the trainer intends to use the case study, it may or may not provide the solution or answers to the problems posed.

How can case studies be used for training and education

There are two aspects to the use of case studies in the classroom or training room: how they can be presented to the participants and what the desired learning outcomes are for the participants.

Learning outcomes

Case studies are a substitute for student placements in the workplace if the course of study cannot allow for this. For this reason, they are particularly useful in a short training course. They also provide realistic simulations of the kinds of real life experiences students can expect when they practice for themselves. For students who are pursuing on-the-job training, case studies can offer alternative experiences, approaches and solutions which will broaden the students' knowledge and skills.

In reading or listening to case studies and thinking about the scenario and possible solutions, students develop skills which they will need to pursue their careers. The skill set includes:

- identification of the problem or challenge
- understanding and interpreting data
- analyzing information
- recognizing assumptions and inferences
- thinking analytically and critically
- exercising judgment
- taking and defending decisions
- understanding interpersonal relationships
- communicating ideas and opinions

Presentation and use

There are many different ways to use case studies. How they are used will depend on the length of the course, the subject matter and upon the delivery style of the trainer.

In a short training course a presentation by the author, perhaps with supporting visual aids, is a really good way of providing practical examples of the theory or techniques that are being covered. The presentation can be followed by questions and answers to give the class a chance to clarify and enhance understanding. This might be a free-for-all or more carefully structured with the presenter asking questions designed to focus participants on particular aspects of the

problem evoked in the case. In a longer course it might be possible to get the class to read through the case study for themselves before participating in discussion.

Case studies can be very effective when they are used comparatively. In this approach the case studies might be presented to or read by the class. This would be followed, once everyone was familiar with the cases, by general discussion, discussion focused by the trainer, group work or even worksheets prepared by the trainer. Again, the object of the follow-up discussion or group work is to help the students to appreciate the challenges inherent in the scenario and think through the various ways of approaching and solving them.

Another possibility is to provide the class with only part of the case study and to get members of the class to act out a scenario. For example, a meeting where the archivist or records manager had to convince other stakeholders of the need for a course of action or provision of funding. The students should be asked to present the individual concerns and point of view of the various protagonists. A variation on this approach is to give some of the details to the class and get them to ask questions to get the full picture.

Case studies can provide the basis of individual or group assignments. The student or group of students is given a case study and asked to write an analysis and any recommendations that seem appropriate. If the students need help in getting started, a SWOT analysis can be very effective — the trainer can provide a list of questions around the four elements (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), or the students can use the schema as a basis for their own analysis.

In longer training courses it can be very effective to get students to develop their own case studies. This allows students to apply their learning, try out their newly gained skills, learn some more and demonstrate what they have learned. By, in effect in writing their own case, students can:

- show that they are able to apply theory to realistic situations
- prove they can identify problems and challenges
- demonstrate their ability to review facts, assess stakeholder relationships and analyses the “big picture”
- exercise their analytical, strategic, and problem solving skills
- offer a choice of options to approach a task or solve a problem

Case Studies

Case studies are useful tools for analyzing real life situations. They often call upon participants to link issues / events with their lives or with issues that they may face in their work /communities. Often a case study is followed by several questions, or an exercise, such as rewriting the ending to a story. In this way, case studies can be used to:

- Suggest alternative ways of dealing with an issue
- Analyze the root causes of an issue
- Find creative solutions to a problem
- Analyze different approaches to an issue

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING CASE STUDIES

- Be clear about the purpose of the exercise and the appropriateness of the case study chosen
- Divide participants into small groups and give them copies of the case study along with instructions as to how to use it (i.e. answer questions at the end, compare approaches, etc.). If a group has low literacy skills, you may ask one person in that group to read the case study to
- others.
- Decide how each group will report their findings and inform them.
- Case studies are most effective when they accompany other activities on a given subject area.

WRITING CASE STUDIES

- Base case studies on actual events or personal knowledge of situations.
- Include enough detail to reflect the complexity of the situation, but ensure that the detail will
- not jeopardize the people, organization or community involved.
- Write or adapt a current case study so that it clearly reflects the objective of the training.
- Before writing case studies, several questions should be asked. These include:
- What is the case study for?
- How will it be used?
- Who is it for?
- What are the needs of the readers and how will it be relevant to their lives?
- How much time do you have allotted to give the case study? - the length should be appropriate.
- What is the experience of the trainers in delivering case studies?
- Are you using a real situation or making up the story?1
- Extra care should be taken to make sure that real situations do not contain actual names

Specific Objective #3: Demonstrate how to develop a case study.

CONTENT:

METHODOLOGY:

► What is a Case Study?

A case study is a training method that refers to a realistic account of a problem and how it is handled. It uses problem solving to reinforce Px' knowledge. Like other experiential learning activities, it enhances retention, recall, and the application of knowledge to real situations. The primary advantage of a case study is that it focuses on a real situation.

Two Types of Case Study

1. Full Information: In this type of case study all of the relevant information for preparing the case study is given at the beginning.
2. Incremental: Here, the information is given in stages. When the Px finishes 1 section of the case study, the section is discussed thoroughly before moving on to the next section.

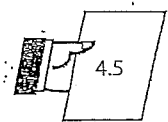
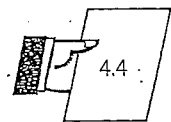
Advantages of the Case Study as a Training Method

- It is participatory and encourages Px interaction.
- Case studies use realistic and relevant cases that relate directly to Px' work.
- Px learn that there may be different perspectives or solutions to the problems presented in the case study.

► Presentation and Group Work: (3 hours)

The trainer should:

- Introduce the activity by reviewing what a case study is.
- Brainstorm guidelines for writing case studies.
- Complete any content they may have missed.
- Hand out *Px Handout 4.4: Case Study*.
- Divide Px into 3 groups. Allow 1 hour for each group to develop a case study, following the guidelines. Ask Px to put the key points from the case study on a flip chart.
- While the Px are working, pass out *Px Handout 4.5: Checklist for Case Studies*. Give each person 2 copies of the checklist explaining that when they present, they will be evaluated using the checklist.
- Reconvene the group. Ask Px to evaluate each case study using the checklist.
- Allow 10 minutes for each group to present their work and another 20-30 minutes to discuss each case study. Include checklist results as part of the discussion.
- Ask Px what steps they would go through to use case studies in their



CONTENT: CONTINUED

METHODOLOGY: CONTINUED

- Case studies help Px develop problem-solving skills.
- Case studies may be developed by either the trainer or Px.
- Case studies give Px a good chance to learn clinical problem-solving without using real patients.

Guidelines for Writing Case Studies

- *Write in story form.* Create the story and then write what you imagine. Make it as realistic as possible. Using a medical case you are familiar with will make it more realistic.
- *Create characters.* Give the characters names that fit the role. In medical case studies, don't use names that Px may laugh at.
- *Create some realistic dialogue.* This makes the story more interesting and realistic.
- *Provide as many specific details as are appropriate and necessary for the Px to analyze the case.* You may or may not want to provide background information. Include detail that enhances the case study or provides essential information. Don't include information that may confuse the Px or side track them from the main task.
- *Be descriptive.* Create a picture in the minds of the Px. If necessary, describe the character's emotional state.
- *Make the story easy to follow.* Shorter case studies are more easily read and understood.

training. Supplement their answers from the content section.

CONTENT: CONTINUED

METHODOLOGY: CONTINUED

- *Provide discussion questions or guides for Px to follow.* This guides the Px and prevents time from being wasted. Use both focused and open-ended questions.

How to Use Case Studies in Training

Step 1: Provide the case study scenario.

Step 2: Tell Px what you expect them to learn from the case study. (Give them the learning objective.)

Step 3: Give them time to learn and absorb the details of the study and to think about how they might solve it.

Step 4: Guide the group through the discussion of the case study. To do this:

- Divide the group into smaller groups.
- Ask each group to select a note taker. Explain to the note taker how you expect things to be arranged on the flip chart.
- Give out guide questions for the case study.
- Give the groups time to carry out a discussion and summarize the results.

Step 5: Bring the groups together and ask them to present their results.

Step 6: Summarize and bring together the results of all of the groups.